

Third Sunday in Lent
March 17, 2019
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Philippians 3:17 - 4:1 Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do. **18** For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19** Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. **20** But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, **21** who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. **4** Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!

“Destination Drives Determination”

Some time away can be really good for you. When you look around you this morning and notice how many people decided to head out of town for spring break, it helps you realize just how true it can be to go somewhere. Maybe you don't have kids in school so you don't really pay attention to the school calendar. Or maybe you have to work this week no matter what the calendar says, so it doesn't really affect you too much. Maybe you'd really like to get out of town, but you realize it would be better not to put a lengthy trip on your credit card or maybe you don't trust your vehicle to travel more than about 20 miles away from home, you can still see the value in going somewhere even for a few days. You decide where you want to go. In the days and hours before you go, you might feel a little more stress because of all the plans and packing and preparations you have to make. But it gives you a little boost. Something nice to look forward to.

It's kind of an interesting phenomenon when you think about it. You could be making a short trip to visit grandma or your grandkids. You could have a single afternoon doing a favorite activity circled on your calendar. Or it could be a fabulous vacation you want to take with your kids before they get too old or that amazing honeymoon you never took and have been saving up for these past years. You look forward to something in the future, near or distant. You work backwards to the present moment and find an added jolt of motivation to do what needs to be done to make that a reality. You make sure you don't get sidetracked. You have direction. A goal. And you're willing to work to make it a reality.

Today as we seek God's guidance from these verses in Philippians chapters 3 and 4, we see God has a destination in store for us. It is actually much better than any place locally or globally we could imagine. The best part is, this isn't some quick getaway you have to earn or win or suffer through to acquire. It's already yours. You have a heavenly home secured for you by your Savior. Your life has a final destination, a glorious goal. That translates into an encouragement from Paul to "stand firm" as you live out your heavenly calling in the day to day reality of being a Christian (Philippians 4:1). As Paul explains in these verses, who

you are and where you are going gives you a unique focus for your life. Your final, heavenly destination gives your daily life determination. The Destination Drives Determination.

It's probably not a surprise that God doesn't have plans to beam you directly to your heavenly home. There aren't any of those moving sidewalks you see in airports, not even escalators in malls, that can transport you effortlessly from your current place to your ultimate destination. So Paul tells us to pay attention. Curiously, he tells us to pay attention to people. He says: **"Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do."** (Philippians 3:17) Then he tells us why we should pay attention to fellow Christians who can positively influence our lives. He brings the reality home that fellow Christians living determined to reach their final destination isn't as common as it should be. In fact, he warns us about **"many live as enemies of the cross of Christ."** (Philippians 3:18) This simple awareness can be immensely valuable in our driven lives to reach our destination.

You can probably think of plenty of examples of people who seem to fit that description of enemies of the cross of Christ. They are the ones who go on rants on Youtube about Christianity or write books advocating for atheism. They make news headlines for mistreating Christians or get lots of attention for ridiculing the teachings of the Bible. But Paul is drawing our attention to a different category of cross enemies. They don't go out of their way to attack Christians or tear down Christianity. One Bible scholar identifies them as the person who "ignores God's fearful and costly judgment on human sin through the death of his Son." (Franzmann) That helps us see how common this type of cross antagonism really is.

That matches pretty well with your experience, doesn't it? Most people you know aren't truly anti-Christian. They just don't give much time to God in their lives. They don't have much concern about what God says to them and it doesn't have much impact on how they live their lives. Paul breaks it down pretty clearly for us: **"Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things."** (Philippians 3:19) Life becomes the goal for life. Desires surging from our bellies drive life: not just cravings for food, but lust, greed, power, revenge, glory. Some people wrongly assume that God's love means we can do whatever we want. Whatever satisfies us and meets our needs will be met with God's approval. Freedom to live your life however you want turns into slavery of those things.

A radio talk show a while back gave the example of a Japanese millionaire who gave instructions to bury his \$ 1.5 million piece of art in his casket so no one else could enjoy his precious treasure after he was gone. Callers responded by sharing examples of people who tried to take things with them. One caller, a minister, shared the experience of officiating at the funeral of a biker. His buddies filed past the casket and each put in one thing—a biker magazine, a leather cuff, etc. Then one came with a sack, opened it, and placed a six-pack of beer in the casket. Some of that might have just been in fun or giving a fitting tribute to someone who meant something to their lives. But being buried with art and depriving it from other people sounds really selfish. And it just shows how easily we have a frame of mind purely focused on earthly things.

The Apostle Paul's antidote to these worldly attitudes is a little unusual. He calls the attention of fellow Christians to his own life. If Paul elsewhere calls himself the worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15), why does he want us to imitate him? It can't be because he made all the right choices and did everything right throughout his life. But it was because he lived with a determined focus throughout life. There is value in recognizing other people around us who have a healthy relationship with Christ. We already know people can have a tremendous influence on our lives, good and bad.

Paul uses his life to point to his heavenly citizenship: **"But our citizenship is in heaven."** (Philippians 3:20) It's helpful to remember Paul was originally writing to Christians in the city of Philippi. This was a city in modern day Greece that was also a Roman colony. That means the people who lived there were Roman citizens even though they were surrounded by lots of non-Romans. Romans really cherished their citizenship. It was a huge advantage for life. It gave plenty of privileges. You could be born with it because of your parents or where you were born. But some people paid heavy prices. Large sums of money. Difficult military service. They weren't going to give up their citizenship. And they certainly weren't afraid to use it for their advantage.

It's a little different for us today. We know there are certain advantages to living in one community or one neighborhood over another. But our society generally applies the law to each of us evenly. Well, except when people try to game the system. This week we learned about an FBI investigation into college entrance scandals. Parents were using money, power, and family connections to get access for children who didn't earn access the way other students did by their test scores and grades, their athletic abilities and extracurriculars. Teaches the opposite lesson that getting into the best schools is supposed to teach. You have to work hard. You have to have more than abilities. You need more than someone pulling strings for you. Your own life experiences and pushing through adversity by yourself will be better predictors of success later in life than the degree on your wall.

This is probably a bigger temptation for Christians inside this church than the more obvious forms of becoming an enemy of the cross of Christ. We want our status as children of God to bring us some shortcuts. We want our heavenly Father to move us to the front of the line. We would be happy to recite all the times we made sacrifices for God. All the examples of denying our fleshly cravings and saying no more earthly objectives. And the truth is, we can get worn out from not getting ahead in this life. We can experience weariness from not seeing results from all our work for God.

Christians can turn away from self-indulgent sinful lives to rely too much on their privileges. We want to focus on our heavenly home, but don't want to coast until we get there. We don't want to wait for Jesus so we curl up in the fetal position until he gets here. We don't want to get so consumed by complaining about those terrible enemies of the cross that we lose sight of our calling as Christians. We don't want to lose track of the positive Christian examples around us. We don't want to get so wrapped up in ourselves that we fail to notice those standing firm in the Lord.

But the Apostle Paul doesn't just point us toward our heavenly destination and leave us to figure things out on our own. He is begging, pleading with us: **"Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends!"** (Philippians 4:1) You can probably hear the voice of someone else with a heart for people. Jesus pours out his heart for the people in his orbit who are caught up in earth-bound focus: **"Jerusalem, Jerusalem...how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing."** (Luke 13:34)

Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem, knowing full well what awaited him there (Luke 13:33). Jesus was driven toward his goal because of people like us who are distracted by life. Jesus was determined to go to the cross for people who are too often too earthbound in their focus. Jesus wouldn't be deterred or distracted or dissuaded from reaching his goal. The cross is the way Jesus secured our heavenly citizenship.

Recently I learned about a new program at Farmington High School called Graduation Coaches. People from the school identify the students most at risk of not graduating. They match them up with a mentor from the community. That coach agrees to have lunch with the student once each month and periodically check in with them. These coaches describe how they changed. At first they thought the students just needed a weekly text message checking in with them and making sure they were getting their homework done. Then they came to realize most of these students were facing bigger challenges like finding a place to sleep for the night or getting more than one meal each day. The destination is clear, but the obstacles can be pretty intimidating.

God's people know where we are headed. Jesus has already secured our heavenly citizenship by his cross. You belong in heaven. Jesus knows the obstacles you face in life. That's why he is with you every step of the way. In this life, God's people are transformed by the death of Christ. In the next life we will be transformed to his resurrected glory. What that means for us today is to put sin to death in our lives. Keeping in mind the ultimate goal of living in transformed glory in the age to come.

What day is today? What is Saint Patrick known for? Most historians and religious scholars agree he was born in Britain in the late 300s AD. he was captured by Irish raiders when he was 16. He served as a slave for 6 years in Ireland and after escaping he made his way back to Britain. He felt compelled to return to Ireland to share the Christian faith with an almost exclusively pagan nation. He spend 12 years studying Scripture to prepare for his work as a missionary. Returned to Ireland to share the gospel at the risk of his life. The faith he had come to rely upon to get him through those dark days of servitude was the hope he was determined to share with the very people who had enslaved him.

Your final, heavenly destination gives your daily life determination. It gives you a different frame of mind to face each day. The blessings in Christ far surpass even the greatest achievement we could accumulate in this life. Your life is heading for a great destination. Stand firm in the faith. Hang onto your eternal inheritance. Follow the positive patterns set for you by faithful believers. Let your destination drive your determination. Amen.